

Joseph Starbuck Houses ("Three Bricks")  
93, 95, and 97 Main Street  
Nantucket  
Nantucket County  
Massachusetts

HABS No. MASS-941

HABS  
MASS  
10-NANT  
57-

PHOTOGRAPHS  
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey  
Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation  
National Park Service  
Department of the Interior  
Washington, D. C. 20240

JOSEPH STARBUCK HOUSES  
known as the "Three Bricks"HABS  
MASS  
10-NANT  
57-

Location: 93, 95 and 97 Main Street (on north side)  
Nantucket, Massachusetts

Present Owners: #93, Eugenie S. Evans (Mrs. Gwynne Evans)  
#95, Pauline Smith Freeman (Mrs. Crowell Freeman)  
#97, Jean Satler Knopf (Mrs. Stacy Knopf)

Present Occupants: Owners

Present Use: Seasonal occupancy.

Brief Statement of Significance: Joseph Starbuck, one of the wealthiest whale-oil merchants of his time, built these three brick mansions, the best known of Nantucket's nineteenth century houses, for his three sons during Nantucket's most prosperous period of whaling.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

## A. Physical History:

## 1. Original and subsequent owners:

- #93 - 1838 -- Joseph Starbuck  
1850 -- William Starbuck was deeded property by his father. William Starbuck died in 1873 and by his will left all of his property in trust for the benefit of his wife Sarah M. Starbuck, and after her death to be divided equally among his four children, Walter Starbuck, Martha A. Fenton, Joseph A. Starbuck and Alfred Starbuck. Sarah M. Starbuck died in 1885.  
1888 -- Gardner J. Kingman purchases property from the four heirs of William Starbuck.  
1920 -- Mary L. B. Waters bought from Charles W. Kingman, son of Gardner J. Kingman.  
1945 -- Reginald H. Waters and Katherine E. Waters Begien had inherited the house on the death of their mother. Reginald H. Waters bought Katherine Begien's one-half interest.  
1945 -- Robert W. Atkins.  
1957 -- Gwynne Evans and Eugenie S. Evans purchased property from Stephen Booth and Dorothy M. Atkins, heirs of Robert W. Atkins. Mr. Evans died in 1965.

1965 -- to date -- Eugenie S. Evans.

#95 - 1838 -- Joseph Starbuck

1850 -- Matthew Starbuck was deeded property by his father. Matthew Starbuck died in 1876, intestate, his property passing to his widow, Catharine Starbuck and four children: Caroline W. Spinney, Florence Palmer, Maria M. Mackay and Horace Starbuck.

1876 -- Catharine Starbuck purchased all other interests in the property. She died in 1913.

1915 -- Maria M. Mackay bought the shares of the other heirs of Catharine Starbuck. Maria M. Mackay died in 1920.

1920 -- Pauline M. Smith inherited the property by will from her mother.

1948 -- Pauline Smith Freeman was deeded the property by her mother, now Pauline Mackay Johnson.

to date -- Pauline Smith Freeman.

#97 - 1838 -- Joseph Starbuck.

1850 -- George Starbuck was deeded property by his father. George Starbuck died in 1888 and through assignment of a mortgage the property had passed on to his son Sidney Starbuck in 1882.

1896 -- Sidney Starbuck conveyed house and land to Elizabeth Starbuck "for and during her natural life" and after her death to his two sisters Ellen Starbuck Swain and Susan A. Starbuck.

1922 -- Charles Minshall bought from Ellen Starbuck Swain and Susan A. Starbuck (Elizabeth Starbuck being deceased).

1937 -- Margaret M. Craig. Property was deeded to her by Robert Minshall, heir of Charles Minshall.

1946 -- Jean S. Gundry purchased from Alexander M. Craig et al, executors under the will of Margaret Minshall Craig.

to date -- Jean Satler Knopf.

(Abstract, Records Registry of Deeds, Nantucket, Massachusetts)

2. Date of erection: Work was begun on the west brick house early in 1837, and in November, 1840 all three were completed at a cost of \$40, 124.00. (Abstract, Joseph Starbuck ledgers in possession of Nantucket Historical Association).
3. Architect: None. James Childs, a "house-carpenter" who had come to the Island from Cape Cod and lived on India Street for over ten years, was the builder. Christopher Capen was the

master mason. He also came from the Cape and was living on India Street. (Abstract, Three Bricks and Three Brothers by Gardner, also records of Nantucket Historical Association.)

4. Original plans, construction, etc.: The three houses are of identical design and have similar interiors. The houses have high, stone front stoops, porticos, large entrance halls and double parlors. The distinctive details of wainscoting and the decorative work about the woodwork are all most interesting and reveal the new elegance which had come to Nantucket.

George Allen Fowlkes in A Mirror of Nantucket states that Joseph Starbuck "felt that his new houses should be like the others on the Island, and it was only upon the strong advice of his son-in-law, William Hadwen, that he decided to modify his plans a bit. Hadwen had come to Nantucket from Newport, Rhode Island, and he was far more cosmopolitan. He was also familiar with the houses from his native town. Tradition is that Hadwen showed Starbuck Stuart and Revett's design for a restoration of the Tower of the Winds in Athens which had a projecting entrance porch with Ionic columns on it. This intrigued Starbuck and with Hadwen supervising the final drawings, Georgian style buildings which resemble in many ways the Salem work of 1820, such as the Pickering Dodge House and the Joseph Peabody House, began to take shape. End chimneys replaced middle chimneys and each room has a fireplace or grate. No walks surmounted these houses; instead a cupola with cut corners was in the center of each roof, and a white balustrade, with panels interrupting the line of balusters, decorated the edge of the front roof."

The original wooden gutters lasted for fifty years for the reason that Starbuck kept a fire burning in a shed at the building site to insure proper seasoning of the lumber.

Glass "lights" were still used at the time these houses were built, but instead of putting them in the wall over the door, here the glass has been placed in the top panels of the doors.

The bricks used in building the houses were brought here from the brickyards of Thomas Murray, Edgecomb, Newcastle, Maine; from John Page, Danvers, Massachusetts, and a half-dozen other firms where the amount of bricks wanted could be immediately "delivered on the wharf at Nantucket" at the lowest price possible. Slate for the three roofs was also purchased through John Page in Danvers, and a slater sent to the Island to do the work.

5. Notes on alterations and additions: Few changes have been made. Modern comforts have been added carefully and all three houses kept in excellent condition.

- B. Historical Events Connected with the Structure: Built by Joseph Starbuck, richest whale-oil merchant at that time in Nantucket and owner of many whale-ships, the three mansions were owned and occupied by the Starbucks for three-quarters of a century. The "Middle Brick" has remained in the family and is now owned by the great, great-granddaughter of the son for whom it was built. Ownership of the other two is now out of the family.

In the "Middle Brick" the wallpaper in the front hall is original while many of the furnishings have remained in the house. Among these are family portraits, old Nantucket maps, fire buckets, the coin silver service which was Matthew and Catharine Starbuck's wedding silver, some pewter and some of the furniture.

During the last quarter of the nineteenth century these three houses opened their doors to good books, good pictures, good music and gracious entertaining; reading clubs and small socials found their parlors and living-rooms attractive places to meet. Many good causes were first proposed and instituted in them; the gathering when the Nantucket Historical Association was organized, May 9, 1894, took place in the "Upper Brick", and the hostess was Mrs. George Starbuck.

Where the "Three Bricks" now stand was a great green yard with one unpainted house standing back from the street with the old pump in the middle of the yard, and the rough board fence running down to the next estate, where now the east brick house stands. The street was unpaved, with a crude covering over the fire cistern in the middle of Main Street at the junction of Pleasant Street opposite the west brick house. Here boys spun their tops while waiting for the Fifth Day Friends Meeting to be out and on the First days to view the throng of Friends that came pouring out of the doors, filling the streets in every direction. (Abstract, Main Street in Whaling Days by George F. Worth, as arranged by Nancy S. Adams. Written about 1880 and now the property of the Nantucket Historical Association.)

- C. Sources of Information:

Chamberlain, Samuel, Nantucket, A photographic sketchbook, New York: Hastings House, 1955. (view of 93 Main Street).

Douglas-Lithgow, Robert Alexander, Nantucket; a history. New York and London: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1914. (includes photograph).

Duprey, Kenneth, Old Houses on Nantucket. New York: Architectural Book Publishing Co., Inc., 1959. (includes early photograph of interior of #97, and views of interior and exteriors of all three houses.)

Eberman, Edwin. Nantucket Sketchbook. Nantucket: S. F. Baker, 1946. (includes drawings of houses).

Fowlkes, George Allen. A Mirror of Nantucket. An architectural history of the Island, 1686 - 1850. New Jersey: Press of Interstate, 1959. (included exterior views of houses and doorway of #97).

Gardnew, William Edward. Three Bricks and Three Brothers; The Story of the Nantucket Whale-Oil Merchant, Joseph Starbuck. Cambridge: Riverside Press, 1945. (includes many views of houses).

Macy, William Francis. The Story of Old Nantucket; brief history of the island, its people. Boston and New York: Riverside Press, 1915; Inquirer and Mirror Press, 1915; Houghton Mifflin Co., 1928. (included photograph).

Prepared by Mrs. Marie M. Coffin  
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## PART II. PROJECT INFORMATION

These records were prepared as part of the Historic American Buildings Survey project on Nantucket, Massachusetts. This is part of a continuing HABS comprehensive survey of the early architecture and urban design of Nantucket financed by a grant from the Nantucket Historical Trust.

The project was under the general supervision of James C. Massey, Chief of the Historic American Buildings Survey. Historical information was provided by Mrs. Marie M. Coffin of Nantucket, Massachusetts. Photographs are by Cortlandt V. D. Hubbard, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. The material was edited for deposit in the Library of Congress by Mrs. Constance Werner Ramirez, July 1971.